

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR, TH

SUBJECT: U.S. NARCOTICS ASSISTANCE TO THAILAND

REF: STATE 027894

SUMMARY. THIS TELEGRAM PROVIDES LATEST INFORMATION AND
COMMENTS REQUESTED IN PARAGRAPH 1 OF REFTEL. END SUMMARY.

1. "DISAPPEARANCE OF SEIZED NARCOTICS" - SINCE THE INITIAL
DISCLOSURE IN THE THAI PRESS IN NOVEMBER 1974, FOUR
SUCCESSIVE COMMITTEES HAVE INVESTIGATED THE ALLEGED
DISAPPEARANCE FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH STOREROOM OF
WHAT WAS ORIGINALLY ESTIMATED TO BE 270 KILOS OF HEROIN
AND 680 KILOS OF MORPHINE. ACCORDING TO COLONEL CHAWALIT
YOTMANI OF THE CENTRAL NARCOTICS BOARD, EACH OF THE FIRST
THREE COMMITTEES ARRIVED AT CONFLICTING CONCLUSIONS. THE
FOURTH COMMITTEE, COMPOSED OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE
MINISTRY OF HEALTH, THE POLICE DEPARTMENT AND THE JUDICIAL
COMMITTEE, IS ATTEMPTING TO RECONCILE THE MATTER AND SUBMIT
A FINAL REPORT. THE ONLY ACTION TAKEN THUS FAR HAS BEEN
THE TRANSFER IN APRIL 1975 OF ONE MINISTRY OF HEALTH
OFFICIAL, MR. CHUWIT RATANACHAI, TO A RESERVE POSITION
PENDING THE OUTCOME OF THE INVESTIGATION. AS DIRECTOR
OF THE FOOD AND MEDICINE DIVISION, CHUWIT WAS RESPONSIBLE
FOR THE STOREROOM WHERE SEIZED HEROIN AND MORPHINE IS
KEPT. (FYI: ONLY SEIZED HEROIN AND MORPHINE ARE STORED
BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH. SEIZED OPIUM IS HELD BY THE
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EXCISE DEPARTMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE.)

2. COLONEL CHAWALIT HAS INDICATED TO US THAT THE FOURTH COMMITTEE WILL PROBABLY CONCLUDE THAT THERE IS NO HEROIN AND MORPHINE MISSING FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND THAT INADEQUATE RECORDS MISLED INVESTIGATORS INTO THINKING THAT LARGE QUANTITIES OF DRUGS HAD DISAPPEARED. CHAWALIT APPEARED TO BE SKEPTICAL ABOUT THIS OUTCOME AND SAID THAT THE CENTRAL NARCOTICS BOARD WOULD HAVE TO VERIFY THE QUANTITIES IN THE STOREROOM BEFORE THE DRUGS COULD BE DESTROYED. CHAWALIT HAD NO IDEA WHEN THE COMMITTEE WOULD ISSUE ITS FORMAL REPORT.

3. THAI/BURMESE COOPERATION: AS A LOGICAL FIRST STEP TO IMPROVE THAI/BURMESE COOPERATION, WE HAVE FOR OVER A YEAR ATTEMPTED TO BRING ABOUT A MEETING BETWEEN POLICE MAJOR GENERAL PHAO SARASIN, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CENTRAL NARCOTICS BOARD, AND HIS BURMESE COUNTERPARTS. PHAO HAS STATED ON MANY OCCASIONS THAT HE FAVORS DISCUSSIONS WITH THE BURMESE BUT THAT THEY WILL NOT ACCEPT THAI INVITATIONS TO COME TO BANGKOK. PHAO HAS TOLD US HE AND OTHER SENIOR POLICE OFFICIALS WOULD LIKE TO GO TO RANGOON TO DISCUSS NARCOTICS MATTERS BUT THAT THE BURMESE WILL NOT EXTEND AN INVITATION.

4. WHILE CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN PHAO AND THE BURMESE APPEAR TO BE A USEFUL WAY OF STARTING A PROCESS THAT COULD LEAD TO FUTURE COOPERATION, WE ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR MEANINGFUL COOPERATION IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE THAI VIEW THE BURMESE CAMPAIGN AGAINST NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS IN THE SHAN STATE AS FIRST AND FOREMOST A CAMPAIGN TO SUPPRESS THE ETHNIC INSURGENTS. MANY THAI TEND TO SYMPATHIZE WITH THESE ETHNIC GROUPS AND VIEW THEM AS A USEFUL BUFFER ON THAILAND'S WESTERN AND NORTHERN BORDERS. EVEN IF THERE WERE TO BE VASTLY IMPROVED POLITICAL CLIMATE BETWEEN BANGKOK AND RANGOON, THE THAI WOULD BE UNLIKELY IN OUR VIEW TO RISK ALIENATING THE TRIBAL GROUPS LIVING ALONG THE BORDER. THIS IS ONLY ONE ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM BUT AN IMPORTANT ONE.

5. WE LOOK FORWARD TO DISCUSSING THESE PROBLEMS AND ALL ASPECTS OF OUR NARCOTICS PROGRAM WITH INTERAGENCY TEAM MENTIONED IN REFTEL.

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